

Alert

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Retained Members www.fbu.org.uk

Summer 2007

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❖ **Wales and a new FBU team**



Opportunity knocks on skills



Editorial



It has been a busy first half of the year, and along with the officials of the National Retained Committee (NRC) I have been involved in the constant fight to improve your conditions and ensure that our employers are implementing in full the national agreements of 2003.

From visiting a number of regions over the past year it is clear that a large majority of brigades have lacked consistency in their application of the pay agreement, with at least one brigade unbelievably paying different rates dependent on the station location.

Some brigades are looking at salary schemes or fixed pay agreements which tend to be made to fit the local pay bills.

Any new duty systems or remuneration models would be a matter for the NJC. The NRC condemns attempts to introduce any changes which threaten long-term stability within a section of the fire service deprived of investment over the years.

With the introduction of annual leave and the 120-hours full retainer many stations are under-established. However,

Part-time worker status could have a major impact on firefighters working the retained duty system

the employers are not prepared to increase the number of firefighters on stations despite a number of reports relating to recruitment and retention.

The legal case under the "less favourable treatment" legislation is still not concluded and is to be heard again in November this year. Part-time worker status could have a major impact on firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS).

The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) is three years overdue and was seen as a major part of the 2003 agreement to give RDS staff a method of measuring their skills and competencies. It has been implemented in some brigades but in different forms, with most brigades having no independent verification process.

The ability to transfer between duty systems is a thorny subject which is raised repeatedly at all levels of the union. Unfortunately despite many different approaches by brigades to address this issue, there is no national guidance available at this point in time and work is ongoing at present.

Tam Mitchell, Executive Council Member, Retained

You and the FBU



PAUL BOX





Retained firefighters training
– we should be rewarded for
our professional job – and pay
protection is key to this.
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Cover picture: Paul Box

Alert, the magazine for FBU retained members, is published quarterly. If you are an RDS member of the FBU and not getting your copy, email Tam Mitchell (thomas.mitchell@fbu.org.uk) and we'll make sure you are added to the mailing list. Email your comments on any aspect of the content of the magazine, or any stories you think **Alert** should cover, to alerter@fbu.org.uk.

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In short



PATRICK STEDRAK/PHOTOLIA

RDS firefighters play a key role in fire cover for Northumberland, protecting local communities and tourists visiting landmarks such as Hadrian's Wall

◆ EC member for retained Tam Mitchell and National Retained Committee chair Harry Cotter recently visited Northumberland to discuss with members and local officials current retained issues in the brigade and the north east of England in general, and to report on the activities of the NRC at a national level in defence of all members working the retained duty system. It was a productive visit and Tam and Harry hope to return to the North East again to progress and report back on some of the issues raised.



◆ RDS firefighter Ray Price has retired from the fire service following an injury that failed to heal, and has thus stood down from his role as retained rep for West Midlands (region 7). The National Retained Committee wishes to put on record its thanks and recognition for his work in driving forward RDS issues in the region and for his substantial contribution to the work of the NRC nationally. Paul Brownhill, a RDS firefighter from Malvern Fire Station in Hereford and Worcester, has been elected to replace Ray as FBU region 7 retained rep.

Employers must honour agreement

PAY PROTECTION

Fire authorities are still failing to honour their commitments made four years ago on pay protection for firefighters working the retained duty system.

Retained firefighters' pay in the Sixth Edition of the Conditions of Service is not salaried, but calculated over an identifiable pay period and based on a range of emoluments and fees relative to their activities and availability. This is unique in that every RDS firefighter across the country will have an individual level of payment.

A significant factor in the make up of RDS pay today is pay protection as detailed in the June 2003 pay and conditions agreement. Pay protection is there to ensure no firefighter (in post) would be any worse off under the new payment system.

The employers thought it was unlikely any firefighters would be worse off due to pay parity being introduced. However, they failed to recognise only positive hours – drill hours or extra work – would produce an increase in parity.

Given that the sub officers and

leading firefighters at the time were on higher turnout fees, their pay for callouts dropped substantially and thus needed to be protected, maintaining NJC increases year on year.

Fire authorities are failing to implement this requirement or applying it as an average calculation over the year. So RDS staff have been paying for their own pay protection – finance departments have been removing it from one pay period and applying it to another, therefore not paying for the reduced period at NJC agreed rates of pay.

Says FBU Executive Council member for RDS firefighters, Tam Mitchell:

“The pay protection system within the 2003 agreement was not a luxury but a requirement to maintain the same increases agreed by the NJC over the last three years.

“Failure of fire authorities to recognise this may result in no pay increase for RDS firefighters, possibly stretching back to before 2003.

“The National Retained Committee will be making every effort to ensure this issue is resolved to the satisfaction of our members.”



FBU steps in with help after ‘no-win, no-fee’

MEMBER BENEFITS

An FBU member working the retained duty system has received around £6,000 from the FBU's Accident and Injury Fund (AIF) following a serious accident at work.

Shane Bedward, who is a firefighter in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, broke his neck while in full-



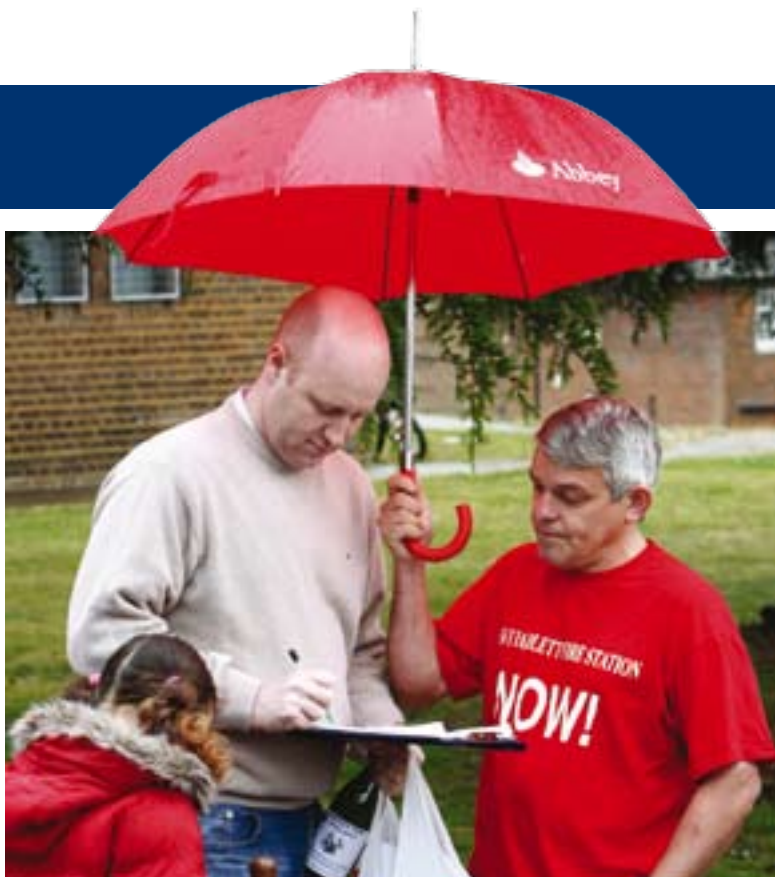
JUSTIN WESTWOOD

Shane Bedward:
AIF is not just for
work-related claims

time employment and as a result was off work for two years.

He is now back at work. Because the accident did not happen while in the employ of the fire service, Mr Bedward pursued the accident claim legally through a no-win no-fee company that rapidly got out of its depth.

Out of frustration, he contacted *Alerter* magazine for some advice and was directed to Thompsons,



Stephen Oaks-Monger shelters Radlett resident Tim Doaden as he signs the petition

Keep our fire station open, 7,000 residents tell council

HERTFORDSHIRE

Campaigners have collected nearly 7,000 signatures supporting the fight to get Radlett retained fire station reopened. Stephen Oakes-Monger, a member of Save Our Fire and Rescue (SOFAR), whose great-grandfather was one of the village's first firefighters in 1907, handed the petition in to Hertfordshire County Council headquarters at the end of May.

Leader of the council, David Beatty, was not there to receive the petition, so it was given to his secretary.

Mr Oakes-Monger said: "Hertfordshire County Council

claims that we have an average of five fires a year. But in the space of two months this year we had four fires.

"I hope they will look into the fact that almost every household in Radlett, nearly all the businesses, restaurants, church leaders, borough and parish councillors and headteachers, have signed this petition.

"This overwhelming support shows we require a fire station."

But the county council has refused to back down on its decision to close the station. Radlett Fire Station was permanently closed by Hertfordshire County Council last October, despite a long-running campaign by the FBU and local community and offers of funding to keep it open.

company gets out of its depth

the FBU's solicitors who have been dealing with the case, which is still ongoing.

Said Shane Bedward: "Had I known about the full benefits of the FBU's Accident and Injury Fund for FBU members, I would have gone straight to the FBU following my accident.

"I thought, quite incorrectly as it turned out, it was just for fire

service related claims. I am extremely grateful to the FBU for the financial help they have provided in what has been a very difficult time for me. I would also like to thank Thompsons for all the ongoing support they are giving me on my legal claim."

→ Want to know more about the AIF or other benefits of being a member of the FBU? Visit www.fbu.org.uk



LYNDON JONES

Wales (Region 8)

Future priorities

Salary schemes, the impact of local integrated risk management plans and pensions are among a number of issues that the new team of FBU retained officials will be dealing with on behalf of members working the retained duty system in Wales.

Following his election as the new retained rep for the region in May, Lyndon Jones will be working closely to advance work with colleagues in the newly formed regional retained committee – including Martin Jones from Conwy Fire Station in North Wales, who had been acting as the Wales National Retained Committee rep, pending the May annual general meeting (AGM) of Welsh retained members.

The FBU Wales retained committee, elected at the AGM in Builth Wells on Saturday 19 May, intend to meet at least every quarter to discuss all aspects of RDS issues and dates for the meetings will be circulated to branches to encourage attendance and participation.

Says Lyndon, an RDS firefighter based at Cefn Forrest fire station: "Despite our concerns about a number of proposals, there have also been some important positive developments as regards RDS members in Wales. We hope to build on our good working relationships with senior management to improve the working conditions of retained members and seek the support and rewards they deserve in carrying out the professional work they do on behalf of the communities they protect and serve."

"We will also ensure that the retained service gets the best possible support at a regional level by acting as the voice of RDS firefighters in discussions the FBU has with political representatives in the Wales Assembly, which recently saw a number of changes in the May elections.

"It was encouraging to see attendance was up on previous years at the AGM and I look forward to seeing more and more members getting active in the Union as we move forward on retained issues."

Briefing

SKILLS BOOST

An FBU Union Learning Fund project will give hundreds of retained members opportunities to develop 'skills for life'

Hundreds of retained firefighters in the South West of England are to be given the opportunity to boost their skills and further their education thanks to a new lifelong learning project launched through the FBU's Union Learning Fund.

The project, a partnership between the FBU, and Gloucester and Avon fire and rescue services, will provide firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS) in both brigades with "skills for life" – numeracy and literacy – through the delivery of a basic IT course.

These courses will provide RDS firefighters with skills that will enable them to learn in a

different and more flexible way. In the future, brigades will be able to offer learning and development through 'blended' packages which mix old fashioned taught sessions with distance learning, and paper exercises with learning delivered by multi-media materials such as CD-ROMs, DVDs and the internet.

The idea is for Avon and Gloucester F&RS to be able to build on this experience and deliver traditional learning such as Equalities or Leadership in an altogether new and exciting way to all firefighters, including those that have traditionally been hard to reach.

Retained duty system (RDS) firefighters have tended to be short-changed on training

The new courses follow a very successful pilot run at Bath fire station, Avon, where the retained crew did IT training at the fire station



and this project, targeted exclusively at RDS firefighters, aims to address that balance.

The result of a successful bid to "Learning works for all" (LWfA), a project managed by the South West TUC on behalf of the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), the new courses follow a very successful pilot run at Bath fire station, Avon where the retained crew did IT training at the fire station.

A key development in the roll-out of the project was the appointment of a project manager Trudi Cox, who has been working flat out to get things up and running as soon as possible.

An introductory session kicked off on June 4 at Cindeford fire station in the Forest of Dean, Gloucester, where 11 Cindeford retained firefighters carried out self-assessments on their learning needs. Joining the firefighters on the evening was Trudi, station manager Gareth Clowes, Dave Griffiths, head of training at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue



The Cindeford introductory session



PICTURES: PAUL BOX

Retained FBU members Andy Fitt, left, and Martin Bundy

Service, and lead trainer, Julie Tench from Gloucestershire's Stroud College, which is the training provider.

Martin Bundy, 49 years old, who has 17 years service under his belt, was one of the FBU members from Cindeford to attend this first session of the course: "My wife and daughter use the computer and I don't so I wanted to learn more about IT. I am hoping that the course can offer some flexibility so that I can fit in the training around my work patterns.

His colleague Andy Fitt, 38, with 17 years service, and a watch manager at Cindeford also attended: "As a watch manager more and more aspects of my job involve the use of the Internet. I want a lot more information so I can do my job better. I think the course will also help me in my other job." Andy hopes to boost his skills using spreadsheets as well as Microsoft PowerPoint, which he plans to use in making presentations.

Says Trudi, who has a background in



Trainer Julie Tench lends a hand

business and education: "This first session went well and I'd like to thank Bev Booth from Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, who is my main contact person there and Tony Dobbs from the IT department in particular for all their hard work helping to arrange it at Cindeford station. Special thanks also to Gareth, the station manager for being so accommodating.

"Some of the students expressed the desire for the course to be flexible to ensure the training fits around their work routine, and we are happy to accommodate that, where possible. We want to ensure that all the participants in this project benefit."

The training was to start proper on 20 June, and will run on a weekly basis through to September. There is flexibility built into the course, so any RDS firefighters who miss a class or two can attend a "sweep up" session at the end to catch up.

Adds Trudi: "I have high hopes for the courses we will be running over the coming months and am currently visiting stations to encourage other RDS station personnel to take part." The Union is hoping that at least 150 RDS firefighters across both brigades will sign up.

Cindeford and Keynsham, Avon will be the trailblazers for the project. A further four retained stations in each brigade will be offered the opportunity to take part in the project over a 17-month period until October 2008 when the LWfA funding ends. After that the hope is that brigades will see the value of this project

and continue it as part of their mainstream training and development agenda.

Bill Hendy, FBU ULF regional co-ordinator for the South West, who has been instrumental in developing the project from the outset, says:

"Firefighters working the retained duty system have long missed out on training opportunities, principally on the grounds of cost. This project aims to address that injustice. We hope RDS firefighters in Avon and Gloucester will take advantage of this opportunity to boost their skills, increasing their chances of advancing their careers and gaining the knowledge that will help them in the wider world, whether at work or in the home."

The FBU's National Retained Committee (NRC) supports the extension of lifelong learning to retained members, adds Pete Preston, a retained firefighter in Colwyn Bay, Wales, and Secretary to the NRC.

"This project is great news for our retained members. We have for far too long been treated as second class firefighters with our training and learning needs seriously neglected.

"This project will help end that disgraceful situation, delivering concrete benefits to firefighters who are the backbone of the fire service in Gloucestershire and Avon, as we are in many communities across the UK. I encourage as many RDS members in these brigades to step forward and participate."

➔ More info on the FBU ULF:
<http://ulf.fbu.org.uk/>



CHESHIRE

Members reject fire service on the cheap

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's plan was to introduce so-called Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) – 'midi'-sized fire appliances, but with only a basic firefighting capability - and to crew them by retained firefighters on a flat rate overtime pay. But our RDS members have rejected the lure of extra money, putting the health and safety of all Cheshire firefighters, and the safety of the communities they serve, first. In rejecting this offer of extra work on rates that undercut Grey Book overtime pay for working time over the contracted 42 hours, our RDS members have also defended the pay and conditions of all FBU members.

The campaign kicked off after Cheshire's draft integrated risk management plan for 2007/8 revealed proposals for two RDS appliances

TRVs are nothing about community safety and everything about savings

(second pumps) at Winsford and Northwich to be changed to TRV status – with only three riders – during the evening. They were to respond to "small fires", which, it was argued, were on the increase at 3–10pm. But, what the brigade failed to highlight was that all types of incidents increase during this period, making it sheer recklessness to slash the availability of fully equipped and properly crewed "structural" appliances.

Underpinning the drive to use TRVs was Cheshire's so-called Risk and Task Analysis. Without any cross-referencing to Fire Service Manuals, these risk assessments did not in any way conform to the tried and trusted firefighting procedures that every firefighter has been trained

in and which have to date ensured safe systems of work.

We concluded right from the start of this campaign that the introduction of TRVs was nothing about community safety and everything about savings. And subsequent events have only confirmed that view. The FBU has just agreed a new day crewing system that means day crew firefighters are now on station during the evenings, including at Winsford and Northwich. Management, knowing full well that this has cost implications, are now less keen on TRVs.

Senior managers have also tried to sell their TRV plan by saying that by staffing the TRVs, RDS firefighters would be able to demonstrate competence in the firefighting elements while greatly improving their promotion prospects.

Well, FBU RDS members are having none of it. Previous plans to replace the RDS appliance at Audlem with a TRV and to introduce TRVs at Chester, Crewe and Warrington have been scrapped following FBU resistance.

But the campaign is not over. One TRV pilot is live at two adjoining two-pump stations in Runcorn and Widnes that would see firefighter and community safety undermined. Senior management have indicated that they see the vehicles being deployed to car fires, automatic fire alarms and road traffic collisions, although due to FBU opposition on health and safety grounds, they are not now pushing for them to respond to anything other than "small known fires".

The FBU will continue our united campaign to stop this reckless drive to create a fire service on the cheap.

Dave Williams
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